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Christianity and Society

- **The Doctrine of the Church and the Problem of Culture**
  J. Coert Rylaarsdam

- **Focus for Christian Action**
  John C. Bennett

- **Explorations into the Meaning of Freedom**
  Albert T. Rasmussen
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- **Editorials**
- **Book Reviews**

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CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY

A Quarterly devoted to Christianity and Social Reconstruction

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About This Issue

The articles in this issue are papers which were presented and discussed at the National Conference of CHRISTIAN ACTION held at Downingtown, Pennsylvania, September 14–16. For a more complete report of this Conference see the forthcoming issue of the newsletter (vol. iii, no. 4) of CHRISTIAN ACTION. Address inquiries to 537 West 121st Street, New York 27, N. Y.

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CHRISTIANITY and SOCIETY

EDITORIALS

People Before an Atomic War

We hope it will not be necessary for historians to record the moods and emotions of men before an atomic war; and we know that, in such an event, there might not be any surviving historians to record them. But, in any event, the public reaction to the news that the Russians now have the hydrogen bomb is most significant. One might have expected hysteria. Instead there is complacency on every hand. St. Paul records his opinion that the alternate moods "of the night" are sleep and drunkenness or complacency and hysteria. Our generation has obviously decided to choose complacency as the proper reaction to the unimaginable terrors of atomic conflict. Perhaps the danger is simply too great for the comprehension of the human imagination. Perhaps there is a rather justified feeling that, if the terror of the hydrogen bomb should strike any of our cities, all civil defense measures would be rather futile. In any event no one is bestirring himself in civil defense business. Perhaps the cold war has relaxed sufficiently to encourage complacency about the possibility of war. The Administration is evidently of two minds on this subject. The Secretary of Defense argued one day in favor of complacency. The Russians, he said, were behind us in the production of atomic weapons; and they did not in any case have the airplanes to deliver the bombs. Mr. Val Peterson, who as Civil Defense Director is naturally concerned to overcome complacency, argued the next day that we were in great peril and ought to bestir ourselves. The head of the Atomic Energy Commission thought the Russian progress in atomic energy would justify the expenditure of an extra ten billion dollars. Thereupon the President rebuked all his advisors for talking too freely and contradictorily on the subject of the peril.

Thus we are delicately poised on the razor edge of history. Considering that we were the generation which was promised all the good things which a technical civilization could produce, but were left unprepared for either the perils of atomic destruction or the evils of communism, we are doing rather well. For it is only the soberness of a profound faith which can absorb all the vicissitudes of history. Sleep and drunkenness, complacency and hysteria may be twin evils, as St. Paul averred. But as between them sleep is probably preferable to hysteria, if that soberness which St. Paul commended is not available.

The Korean Peace

Only the sturdiest optimist can still have hopes that the Peace Conference on Korea will result in a genuine settlement. The Armistice was possible because both sides wanted to stop the blood-letting. A peace is not possible for two reasons: The first is that we have announced that we will not bargain on any of the issues which the Chinese regard as important. The possibility of agreeing on Secretary Dulles' proposal for the demilitarization and neutralization of Korea is practically ruled out by the knowledge that our friends, the South Koreans, would not agree to such a pro-

posal. President Rhee's intransigeance and the promise he exacted of us to quit the conference if it did not succeed in a given time put the whole conference under a cloud which has been accentuated by other developments.

But the second and main reason why the prospects for peace are so dim is that it has now become advantageous to the communists to delay any peace. They will do this because they intend to increase the rift between ourselves and our allies which was so vividly revealed in the United Nations votes on issues having to do with setting up the Peace Conference. The most crucial issue was on the question whether India was to be invited. We won on that issue only because a two-thirds vote was required to seat India. Most of our friends in Europe and Asia voted against us. The question of India's inclusion had now revealed a deeper issue. India was known to favor the admission of China to the United Nations. Almost the whole free world, except ourselves, agrees with India on that issue. That is why they voted against us. This victory over our friends in the United Nations may cost us dearly, for it revealed the rift, which the communists evidently intend to exploit. It may be remembered that before Stalin's death the Communist Party of Russia adopted the policy of accentuating the "contradictions" in the "capitalist" world. The old communist dogma of the inevitability of capitalist conflict was revived to give credence to the new hope that America and the other free nations could be separated from each other. The chances of doing this on the issue of the inclusion of China in the United Nations are so good that it makes the chances of peace practically negligible. If these are the fruits of the new and vigorous foreign policy, calculated to "roll back" the communist power, we can only say that a little less vigor and a little more wisdom and modesty would probably have been more fruitful. No good reason can be given for excluding China from a world organization in which Russia is already a member. There are good reasons for excluding China from the Security Council. Our allies probably meet our views on this point. Britain, incidentally, never believed that China should be on the Security Council. But European nations are practically unanimous in their opinion that it would be to the advantage of the free world to invite China to the Assembly and thus prevent the Russians from posing as the nurse for the infant China.

Our Concord with Spain

Our critics in France and Britain and our American "liberals" are naturally outraged by the military convention with Spain. It calls attention to an ancient and perennial problem of the tension between the moral content of a cause and the strategic necessities of its defence. Spain is a decadent and corrupt nation, or rather it is the victim of a decadent and corrupt form of government which is unworthy to be enlisted on the side of democracy. Unfortunately the more France, our chief critic in Europe, becomes unreliable as a partner the more Spain becomes important as a strategic ally. Our view of this matter is colored both by the knowledge that the tension between moral content of a cause and the strategic necessities of its defence is always great and by our realization that the value schemes of 1930 have become otiose. Even a corrupt authoritarianism is not to be equated with fascism since it lacks the latter's demonic power, and communism is not to be preferred to fascism because some "hope of the future" is in it. Spain is a part of the European community which must be defended. She is not a part of the spiritual community of the "free world." But France hardly belongs to that community. Many of the present critics of our strategy may have forgotten with what enthusiasm they hailed Churchill's gesture to Russia on occasion of the Nazi revolt. It was a bold stroke of statesmanship which prevented the victory of Nazism through division between incompatible allies. The price of that victory was very high of course. We are still paying it today in countering the Russian menace. But no

sensible person would have had another decision made at that particular point in history.

At the time when Britain was no longer able to bear the burden of the defence of Greece she whispered to us and we took the burden upon ourselves in the famous "Truman doctrine." The "liberal" criticism of Churchill as an arch "Machiavellian" had forthwith to cease. But the European criticism of America as a ruthless power, insensitive to moral realities, began. The strategic facts were that the fall of Greece would not only have opened the Mediterranean to communist power; it would have, in all probability, led to the political fall of France as our ally. Gradually we achieved the maturity to realize that we must accept some moral ambiguities in the strategy of our defence. We are, after all, defending not democracy but a larger value of "civilization." Perhaps one of the ancillary causes of the confusion in our day, is the equation of democracy with civilization. Our civilization should not have to achieve an ideal democratic order to remain preferable to the tyranny and totalitarianism which threatens the world.

Naturally there are limits beyond which one must not carry strategic considerations without emptying the cause defended of moral meaning. Those limits at the present time are obvious, not so much in our relation to Spain as in the relation of atomic power to the moral content of civilization.

Eisenhower's Problem on Taxes

Recently President Eisenhower told a Boston audience that "No sacrifice, no tax, no price would be too high to pay for the defense of the free world," while on the following day Secretary Humphrey assured the nation that the reduction of taxes in the new year was certain and that the budget would be balanced. These two statements give us the key to the future and to the inevitability of a sales tax on the manufacturers level. A retail sales tax was ruled out by the President and is ruled out by its universal unpopularity. The manufacturers tax is inevitable because it is the only device which will cover the tension within the Republican party between the "interventionist" wing of the party, which takes our world responsibilities seriously, and the prudential and commercial wing of the party, for which a balanced budget and lower taxes are the *sumum bonum* of all political policy.

President Eisenhower was elected because he was, on the one hand, the symbol and the instrument of a responsible foreign policy and because he was, on the other hand, a skillful politician who knew how to speak the language of that part of Republicanism which approached all the complex problems of our day with the one question: "How much will it cost?" In campaigning against Taft he promised in fact to reduce taxes by thirty billion dollars. Taft never took advantage of this revelation of ignorance. He simply implied that the elimination of "waste and corruption" would not yield such a sum. When Eisenhower came to power, he consistently followed the primary impulses of his political history. He resisted the fools who wanted to cut taxes immediately, and he even extended the unpopular excess profits tax in order to balance the budget. But now the increasing needs of defence and the automatic cancellation of all kinds of taxes, chiefly excise taxes, in 1954 threaten a budget deficit of ten billion. What is to be done about covering this contradiction in Republican policy? There is obviously only one answer. The budget can be balanced only by a sales tax. Since such a tax on the retail level would be impossible in the year before the congressional elections, the manufacturers tax seems inevitable. At least its proposal is inevitable. Whether it will pass a reluctant Congress, which is naturally more interested in the mid-term election than the President, is another question. But there is no question about the political arithmetic which forces the administration to suggest the manufacturers tax.

The Church and Political Decisions

In 1952 the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches appointed a nine-man Board of Review to inquire into the affairs of the Council for Social Action, which had been accused of all sorts of crimes and misdemeanors by a group of conservative laymen. The Board, which included some very thoughtful and distinguished laymen, has now made its report. It absolved the staff of charges of disloyalty, subversion etc. and then went on to say: "Differences among Christians usually occur in the realm of means rather than ends." In the former realm the Board thought that the Council or its staff had sometimes "slanted its policy in the direction of a particular political program" and that in its lobbying activities it had not been careful enough in avoiding positions upon which there was no general agreement in the Church.

The report was a very judicious one. Therefore it may well write a chapter in the history of "social Christianity." The history which precedes the report certainly has constituted a significant chapter on the problem of the relation of the Church to the social order. The fact is that the Council for Social Action was and is a unique achievement in the Christian Church. It was the only officially authorized instrument of the Church which dared to take positions on debatable and contested political issues, usually on the "liberal" side of the issue. Since the Christian Church is not organized on the basis of common political convictions, the Council could carry on its program only because the Congregational churches had achieved a remarkable homogeneity on political convictions far above the level of the economic "conditioning" of its members, and because the leaders of the Council combined judiciousness with boldness so that vague futility was avoided on the one hand and undue friction between the churches and the Council on the other. The report of the Board of Review would lead one to assume that even the wisest statesmanship is, however, not enough to overcome the fact that the Church is not organized on the basis of common political convictions. The Board puts the inevitable disagreements in the realm of means rather than ends. But politics is a vast realm of means and ends, and of means which in a certain context are also ends.

We do not know what change of policy will be effected by this report. Perhaps the Council will further exploit a policy without which it could not have survived at all, and upon which the effectiveness of the World Council of Churches rests. That is the policy of speaking boldly to the churches even on controversial issues while refraining from speaking for the churches to the world on issues upon which it is impossible to assume or to achieve a common mind. The report makes full provision for this procedure. We must come to terms with the fact that the Church, even when united in the "mind of Christ" on the highest level, bears within it the cross purposes of a divided world. Insofar as this is true, the Church must cherish, but not identify itself with, groups which speak upon the basis of common political convictions and claim no more than that they speak from the standpoint of their Christian faith, but recognize that conscientious Christians will be persuaded to arrive at contradictory decisions on the same issues and upon the basis of the same faith. For there is no logic which will compel common convictions among Christians except on minimal standards of conduct where there is a clear relation between the love commandment and some obvious answer to even a complex political issue.

The judiciousness of the Board of Review's report and its specific disavowal of religious "neutralism" as desirable lead one to believe that the essential work of the Council for Social Action will not be seriously altered or hampered by this report with the possible exception of its lobbying activities.

The Doctrine of the Church and the Problem of Culture

J. Coert Rylaarsdam

I

In Christian faith the term Church is the symbol which stands for a *dynamic* freedom made possible by an objective structure of reality and meaning. The historic Christian affirmation "I believe one holy, Catholic Church" is not the repetition of a creedal formula but a testimony of human freedom which is a gift of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

The Church is first and foremost a divine reality. This distinguishes it from all other realities. Empirically, of course, the Church is people, it is a social and cultural phenomenon. It is a religious, moral and educational movement. But for those who, by faith, affirm it and belong to it, it is the whole family of God in heaven and on earth, it is the work of God in the world. The Church is the concrete embodiment of the Christian myth. The center of the Church is not in man but in the living God who is the source of man's life and power.

The Church is God's work in the world in a special sense. All nature and history is the work of God. But the Church is that work of God in the world in which he makes himself known and manifests the manner of his work. It makes concrete the perspective from which the Christian views life. The Church is that revealing and redeeming work of God in which men know their nature and destiny and in which the resource for their fulfillment is provided. The Church is that work of God in the world which he began in Jesus Christ; it is God's Word, announced in the Gospel, that proclaims that God is Love. By the light of this Gospel, rooted in a particular, historic event, the universal dominion of God is to be interpreted, understood and given a center of coherence.

In the Old Testament Israel was the Church, the visible sign of this special self-disclosing and redemptive work of God. Its form was the "promise." Israel was God's son, God's bride, God's chosen. These special titles attest that in his deliverance and establishment of Israel God intended to make himself known in the world. Through Israel the "knowledge" of God would go out to all nations. This does not just mean the missionary activity of Israelites. It means that God's activity in the redemption of Israel was in itself a disclosure of his character and the measure of the meaning of all existence.

In the New Testament the situation is similar. The Church is "the body of Christ," and "bride." God's "new" saving act expresses itself in Jesus Christ who is the "chief cornerstone" of the Church, which is built "on the foundation of prophets and apostles" (Eph. 2:20). The Church is the new covenant and its form is the Gospel of the grace of God. It holds the key to the meaning of all life. This is the true evangelical meaning of the description of the Church as the "Una Sancta." The famous papal bull by this title said that it was the right and destiny of the Church to rule the world. But it confounded the Church as the revelation of God in his Gospel with the institution of men. The Church which outrides the hurricanes of history, *a la* St. Augustine, is God in his freedom at work on earth. The Church affirms that God is LORD of History.

Current tendencies in Protestant exegesis of the New Testament seem increasingly to warrant the statement that for the New Testament, as for the Old, the activity of God expresses itself concretely; the Church is not *a* result of God's redemptive work, but *the* instrument for it, though all sorts of Protestants would reject this. As good Protestant Sunday School boys all of us were probably taught that the famous reply of Jesus to Peter's confession (Mt. 16:18) referred to Peter's personal affirmation of faith. It was said that the Church would be the outcome of confessions such as Peter's.

The Lord could use people who made a confession such as his, whether they were apostles was quite irrelevant. This way of handling this crucial passage goes back to the Reformation. If you went to a more liberal Sunday School than I did, you may have been told that the passage was a late interpolation designed to further the role of the Roman See. But both this "spiritual" interpretation of it and the alleged spuriousness of the passage are challenged today by responsible Protestant students. Oscar Cullmann, in explicating his view that the Gospels do not yield to the apocalyptic interpretation of Schweitzer and that the Church was indicated as the redemptive instrument in history from the "mid-point" to the Parousia, says that the "attempt to refer the words concerning the rock to the faith of Peter instead of to his person is not at all suggested by an unprejudiced exegesis" (*Christ and Time,* p. 173). For Cullmann the passage recognizes the leadership of Peter among the apostles who were to be the "foundation" of the Church. This implies a concrete and material aspect of the Church as one would have to expect in a Jewish setting. It also implies that Jesus was not an apocalypticist. The apostles possess the power of their "office" as well as their charisma, a power which is the gift of the Gospal. Cullmann makes clear that the apostolic foundation is a once-and-for-all affair. There is no implication in Mt. 16:18 that the apostolic office continues. Whatever follows in the way of a succession of form is *from* the apostles, not of them. And God remains Lord in his own Church. But note that the Church is thus seen as the instrument and not as a result among men of the work of God. The Church is an organism of life called out by God for his service; in typically Jewish fashion it is both "material" and "spiritual."

We have all told congregations of Christians that "the Church is not a club." But we have not always agreed on what we meant when we said it. Nor does such a word "sink in" easily among our people. For some it simply means that the Church has an open membership: "No applicants turned down." For some it hints at the peculiar line of interest of the Church: not cards, sports, politics or books, but "religion." Others go farther and say that it is the instrument for the moral training of the race, just as schools, the nearest relatives, are preoccupied with intellectual training. And the contents of this "moral training" may well be described as "the divine law." Some go still farther and think of people gathered for worship. But whatever its functions, the Church so conceived is a human creation.

It is my impression that the greatest weakness and failure of Protestantism in our day, notably of liberal Protestantism, is that it has lost sight of the Church as a divine reality and object of faith. The article in the Creed "I believe in . . . the holy Catholic Church" has become an empty phrase so that today the great bulk of Protestant Christians are glib at discussing the churches without being able to say a thing about the Church.

We say that Protestantism fails and suffers because it loses sight of the Church as a divine reality. But first we must remember that there is a great segment of American Christians, Baptists and their friends-and-relations, who have not lost sight of the Church; they have never seen it. Their answer to the question "Did Jesus found a Church?" is a flat "No." The Apostle's Creed and its article about the Church is an unknown item to the typical Baptist. He has never thought in terms of "*one* Holy Catholic Church;" he knows the word only in the plural, "churches." "Churches" are gathered fellowships of believers who have individually and personally confessed God's redemption in Jesus Christ and who have sealed this confession by baptism. Baptists do not for a moment deny God's peculiar work in the world in Jesus Christ. They affirm this as the redeeming work of God that is indispensible for salvation. But they question that this work expresses itself in the foundation of the Church. Men are not saved in the Church, but as individuals. God's covenant is with individuals. It

is well to recognize that all Protestantism, with the partial exception of Anglicanism and possibly Lutheranism, is deeply infected by this Baptist view of God's way of working in Christ. Notice, for example, that infant baptism in most of these Churches has virtually lost its sacramental character and been reduced to a rite of dedication not fundamentally different from dedicatory rites in some Baptist churches. This widely diffused Baptist position has all sorts of results. It exalts the rights of conscience and of individual religious and social liberty. It is the enemy of all who "brand nonconformity as treason." It encourages the "private interpretation" of Scripture. It encourages social and cultural individualism and assumes, implicitly and by default, the secular character of the whole cultural enterprise. It finds it very easy, too easy, probably, to maintain "the separation of Church and state" in the characteristically American fashion. But, disavowing any pattern for a cultural role of its own, it sometimes seems to be terribly exposed to, and horribly at the mercy of, cultural forces that owe no allegience to the peculiar work of God in Jesus Christ. In their very eagerness to get out of the "world" Baptists often find themselves all the more beset by it. When a Baptist goes "liberal" he is therefore apt to be pretty completely caught up in the cultural and social relativities of his nation and generation. This point of view misses the full implications of God's redemptive work in the world. It does attest the reality and power of the living God as the source of man's life. Yet, failing to see the full scope of this activity as embodied in the term Church, it finds it increasingly difficult to attest either the meaning or the relevance of its testimony. Its adherents are always being reduced to little islands of faith surrounded by a surging sea of "unbelief" about which not much can be done. And sometimes a whole island disappears in the sea by "going secular."

But why do the Reformation Churches that started off with an affirmation of the Church as a divine reality forsake their position, either by going "Baptist" or some other way? The violent reaction against Rome in the Reformation Churches undoubtedly contributes to it. Protestantism rejected a system which completely equated the Church as a divine reality, an object of faith, and an hierarchical institution managed by men. Like the ancient Hebrew prophets it attested God's freedom. God alone is Lord in his Church. There resulted, very often, a very sharp line of cleavage between the Church and the churches in the thinking of Protestants. The Church as a divine reality tended to become a "spiritual" entity that no longer had any really vital and organic connection with the human institutions called churches. Gradually a more anthropocentric and *individualized* experience-centered notion of the work of God in the world took over. At heart we all became Baptists or (?) Methodists.

But there is finally a deeper, *i.e.*, theological, reason than the peculiarities of Protestant history to account for this withering away of belief in the Church as the peculiar work of God in the world. The deepest reason is lack of a living faith. It is not easy to entrust all of one's life to God, in every part of it. Catholicism also lost faith in the Church as a divine reality. It indicated this by making an idol of its own expression of it. Baptists can't affirm the Church because they do not quite dare to believe that God rules the whole world, the God whose creative and redemptive character is manifest in Jesus Christ. There is another line of faithlessness which expresses itself in the inability to see anything particular in the activity of God expressed in Jesus Christ. This has been the fate of liberal Christianity. *Its* anthropocentricity lost sight of the Church by reducing it to an aspect of a general human expression of culture which it idolized. The human process was looked at as essentially self-determining and the Church was no more than the noblest and most daring reach of the human spirit. As God's instrument for his work in the world the Church is a dynamic and not a static reality.

II

Thus far we have tried to look at the Church as a divine reality. We have tried to see it as a subject for theological discussion. And we have seen, by way of illustration, that the actual functions and expressions of churches change in relation to the actual theological meaning that is given to the Church as the work of God in the world. Not the inherited standards or confessions about the nature of the Church but the current and largely unsystematic belief about it will determine the role of denominations and congregations. A study of the churches as social structures can be an excellent way of discovering what they mean by being churches.

It has often been noted that the denominations, free or otherwise, have assumed characteristics one from another until distinctions which used to classify them are no longer significant. This is actually to understate the problem of denominationalism as we have it. The very existence of the denominations as we know them is, it seems to me, a sign of Protestant confusion. The denomination is neither a church nor a sect. But in some sense or way it manages to combine in itself the worst features of both. Some denominations trace their existence to a church either in Europe or in America. As a church the antecedents of such denominations assumed sole and comprehensive responsibility for the entire religious and cultural life in the area in which they were set. Such a church represented the one Holy Catholic Church in the nation or region concerned. It recognized no equals and very often it sought to suppress those who changed its exclusive role by separating from it; namely the sects. But in America the descendents of such churches have become denominations with a policy of live and let live. Most of them, notably Presbyterian, Congregationalists, Lutheran churches do not even pretend to fulfill the exclusive role their ancestors assumed. Episcopalians make some sentimental but not very convincing gestures in this direction. Even the Roman Church which formally and doctrinally adheres strongly to its ancient claim of being the Church, has actually surrendered to the denominational ethos in many subtle ways. On the other hand groups that were once sects rather than churches—Baptists, Methodists, etc., even Mennonites and Brethren, have all also achieved the status of denominations. Increasingly they surrendered their role of representing an unusually specific and intensive strain of spiritual experience thus making it unnecessary for them any longer to seek converts from among the larger bodies. Simultaneously they have given up some of their notions about the evil nature of the world so that the "cell" culture which they once nourished is no longer a real preoccupation. They take their place, as denominational units should, on equal levels with all others and increasingly stand for the same values the others stand for. Thus we have the amazing spectacle of a Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Mennonite "parish," all superimposed on the same geographical plane. Thus denominations continue to exist by virtue of a policy of mutual respect which makes it impossible for any to insist upon a uniqueness, not in some sense shared by all the others. It is impossible for one of these denominations to assume serious responsibility for the Christian cultural vocation without at once arousing the suspicion and resentment of all the others. Nor, it seems, is it possible for these denominational organizations to combine in fulfilling the cultural vocation of the church. Rather, currently, jealousies and rivalries of a sociological nature are reinforced with inherited differences as to the theological nature, if any, of the church's function with respect to culture. When Catholics go in for Catholic education it is said that they introduce a divisive element into our culture. When Lutherans and Episcopalians run old people's homes and hospitals we worry about the social and civil solidarity. And when a denomination reverts to the role of a sect by developing a peculiar cultural tendency among its own people we consider it clannish and unbrotherly. But in the meantime the roles for the inspiration of our

common cultural and civic life become increasingly secular. The result of this denominational forbearance is to deprive the denominations of an area in which the Christian faith can function significantly. There are fewer and fewer areas in life in which Christians can claim a role for themselves. It is seriously to be questioned whether this price for religious tolerance or liberty is, after all, not too great.

The tolerance of denominationalism is really the form of an anarchy which if it persists will progressively make the Christian faith meaningless and incommunicable. This kind of anarchy that now passes for religious liberty cannot prevail if the Christian faith is to inspire the structure of our society and its institutions.

The Christian faith, if it is indeed a Catholic faith, must determine the whole social structure. Christians either must be a part of the Church which can and will undertake cultural responsibility on this comprehensive level; or, if they happen to feel that God is only interested in saving some people from this evil world and consequently are not concerned with cultural responsibility, they can form close brotherhoods of Christian life and experience that constitute miniature cultures in themselves. They cannot continue as denominational groups who for all practical purposes relegate cultural responsibility to other forces of secular inspiration.

III

I want now to continue this analysis of the churches' confusion about themselves and their role in the world by looking at the ways in which they conceive their cultural vocation or relate themselves to the culture in which they stand. Here their own confusion and the novelty and complexity of the American scene touch one another.

In the Old Testament the Church is coterminous with the entire Israelite culture. In the days of Israel's political independence this meant that the political and religious power coalesced. Even when the administrative functions were carefully separated and balanced, they were two sides of the same coin. When Israel was bereft of its political autonomy the foreign political rulers were, by every means possible, kept from contaminating Israel's integral cultural existence, which continued to be the Church expressing its faith in Yahweh. Whether under the Persians, the Romans, or the Russian Czars, Jews, as politically subject people, affirmed the separation of Church and state. That is, nurtured by their peculiar faith, they lived as a culture within the great societies without losing their cultural identity. The best Christian parallel I can think of is the 18th and 19th century Quakers, who unlike Baptists, were concerned about a total way of life to express their religious experience and faith. To a much greater extent than most *goyim* realize this continues to be the case: laws about dress, about food, about sex and marriage, and about death and burial; material objects such as phylacteries and mezumim, scrolls and torsh shrine; daily forms of prayer, ablution, and segregation. There is not a moment of the day when in his normal activities, the Jew is not tangibly reminded of who he is and what he represents.

Not until the Haskalah, the Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries, did this system even partially break up to admit something of an infiltration of the modern scientific and philosophical outlook. This meant modern education, literature, art, medicine, and so on. These are now permanently assimilated by the Jewish ethos. But it seems that any hopes or fears that this opening of the Temple doors to let in the science and thought of modern secularism would be the beginning of the end of Judaism as a separate socio-cultural entity can now safely be abandoned. Today we witness a Jewish spiritual and cultural Renaissance such as has not existed, perhaps, since Spanish Jewry. Jewish art, Jewish music, Jewish literature and Jewish education, the Jewish homeland: in and through these even the most secularized Jews are recovering their Jewish souls. I commend to you Meyer Levin's recent book, *In Search*. Many such as he who did not know Jewish "theology," who

did not even know how to use the prayer book, who never went to a synagogue (and still seldom do) have recovered their spiritual home in terms of its cultural expression. In America, where they will inevitably remain a tiny minority, Jews rejoice in religiously neutral institutions. To this day, Jewish apologists frequently reject Christianity as irresponsible apocalypticism.

Well, whatever the actual teaching of the New Testament, Christianity soon began to perpetuate the Old Testament heritage from its own particular center in the Christ event. Art, music, ethics, education, philosophy, architecture, society, and finally government itself became a single fabric inspired by the faith of which the Church was the custodian. Christian experience seemed to dictate a cultural vocation that was comprehensive. The outcome was Catholic culture. It must be emphasized that this apprehension of the cultural vocation as comprehensive antedated by a good long while rigid idolatrous pretensions of the institution in which the Church was embodied. The Church was simply conceived as the instrument for the accomplishment of God's work in the world, and this meant the ordering of the whole of life. Medieval culture did not break up because it was Christian but because it was at the mercy of the rigidity of an idolatrous institution. It was the idolatrous pretension of a particular institution that was rejected by the right wing of the Reformation, not this ordering of the whole of life. The apocalyptic irruptions that expressed themselves in the left wing of the Reformation rested on a special and possible (but not probable or complete) interpretation of the New Testament and took a very different view. They are currently perpetuated in Jehovah's Witnesses and others.

Despite the Reformation, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and all the acids of modernity the spirit of Catholic culture still lives. But it survives despite the fear, the pride and ossivication which is the fruit of Roman Catholic idolatry. Catholic culture is warped, twisted, and in large measure archaic because this inflexible idolatry prevented it from taking up into itself and assimilating the meanings given in the Reformation and in the modern spirit. In all this it presents a striking anology to Judaism. And, as in Judaism, there is currently a renascence in Catholic culture. It is, I believe, much less powerful and comprehensive than the Jewish renascence. But it does exist. Notably in literature and art there are fresh forms which are both contemporaneous and true delineations of Christian experience and faith in its Catholic mould. In fact, in the best of these even the "Catholic mould" ceases to be obtrusive and what appears is an authentic delineation of Christian faith by spirits that live in the present. I think of such writers as Bernanos, Bloy, and Péguy. Increasingly they have their counterpart in America also. How inclusive this renascence will become remains to be seen. Will it, for example, be able to deal creatively with the processes of life expressed in economics, education, sociology, and politics as the Jewish renascence does? Personally, I doubt this. And the reason for my doubt is the persistence of the institutional idolatry which made the maintenance of Catholic cultural integrity impossible in the first place. It must be remembered that such professed interpretations and "solutions" as are officially and currently offered in this area are, for the most part, attempts to make dead bones live. This goes for such encyclicals as *Quadragessimo*. A true renascence anywhere must spring spontaneously from the soil. The Vatican is just as helpless as the Chief Rabbis or the World Council of Churches to bring it about. So far the Chief Rabbis have perhaps stood in the way less than the Vatican.

Insofar as the Roman Church is an idolatrous institution, it stands in the way of the renascence of Catholic culture. But we must take heed lest in fighting the one we deny the authenticity of the other. We must never forget that the embodiment of Christian faith and experience as Catholic culture is an integral segment of the substance of western civilization. To

seek to extirpate it is, as in the case of the Jewish heritage, to mutilate our own roots. At the same time we must unceasingly battle every political ecclesiasticism when and insofar as it stands in the way of a cultural pluralism. I find it helpful to ponder some of the concrete problems in the American scene, for example, that of education, in terms of this double consideration. The tendency of a specific culture to permeate the whole of a society in terms of its peculiar forms and ethos is a mark of its vitality. Any attempt by it to deny other cultural strains in the whole society to do likewise seems to indicate a demonic corruption. How to give each culture with its peculiar forms, institutions, and ethos its widest freedom is a perennial problem in a pluralistic society, one that demands alertness, fairness, patience, and faith to believe that the role of each in the whole will, in the long run, be a measure of its authenticity and vitality.

The whole point of this somewhat lengthy discussion of Jewish and Catholic cultures as aspects of their understanding of the Church in its cultural vocation is to illustrate the necessity for cultural pluralism and also to throw into relief the nature of Protestant understanding of the work of God in its cultural dimensions. We have already said enough about this to warrant a general statement: when Jewish and Catholic expressions of the Church in its cultural dimension decay there is ossification; in Protestantism there is evaporation. Whether in post-exilic Judaism or in modern Catholic countries, when the Church in its cultural expression is no longer able because of idolatry to take unto itself the whole of human experience there is rebellion, civil war, suppression, anti-clericalism, etc. An apparently lifeless form lies as a road-block in the way of the processes of human life that simply cannot be suppressed. So there is violence and bloodshed. Spain is the most tragic example of this in our generation. Not so with Protestantism; when it ceases to express the work of God in its cultural dimension, it just disappears, for the forms in which it expresses itself normally enjoy administrative and institutional, though not spiritual, autonomy. It leaves no corpse-like institutions or forms which block the road to dynamic expressions of life that rush in to fill the vacuum left by its decay. It leaves a beautiful after-glow, a mild radiance reflected in the largely secularized cultural forms that it once inspired and that embodied it. There is a beautiful "Indian Summer:" everything seems to stand still. It is extremely difficult to decide whether you are in life or in death, whether it is autumn or spring. Protestant culture's decay is so much more genteel and humane; but like some deadly diseases, it is so subtle a process that it is often far advanced before it is detected. It seems that for Protestantism the Church in its cultural dimensions is always a more "spiritual" thing, more mobile, and more intangible than either in Judaism or in Catholicism. Consequently, it may on occasion, accomplish its cultural vocation without seeming to do so. At another time it may seem to flourish, but actually be in decay. I may be wrong, but just now the sweetness of autumnal decay seems to be upon it.

But in large areas even this very "spiritual" understanding of the Church in its cultural dimension does not exist. In America, to a much larger extent than we sometimes realize, the communication of Christian faith and experience at the "grass roots" level is in terms of the historic Baptist conception of the work of God. All sorts of fellowships and groups are evolved by this: Pentecostals, Church of God, Bible Churches, Adventists, Christadelphians, Nazarenes, "free" Baptists, etc., etc. These are the real "feeders" for our respectable denominations. And these along with all fundamentalists are a-cultural in outlook. They interpret the word "Ekklesia" to mean that God has called them *out* of "the world." Henceforth they are to ignore it. Education, art, the political, social, or economic structures: these are just the forms of "the world that passeth away." God in Christ has nothing to do

with it. He calls men to "come out," but of course, life isn't as "spiritual" or apocalyptic as that. The "end" does not come. While waiting for it these people lead sober lives, work for a living, get married, have children, and become culturally responsible. The newly discovered economic, social, and political responsibility is interpreted in terms of the national ethos, in terms of the community standards that guard the entrance to the way of socio-economic advancement and material and cultural achievement. About all their "churches" offer in the way of "heritage" and direction is sincerity, personal character, and the instinct to look for and choose "the best" in all things. Unless these churches as a whole become "respectable" they will now soon lose these "educated" members to those denominations who were once as they are now: the "regular" Baptist and Methodist. The "respectability" of these "regular" churches and many others who did not have this origin, consists precisely in this that they, like their newly received transfers from "the queer sects," have also accepted cultural responsibility in terms of the national ethos and its institutions and in terms of those community standards and forms that govern the pattern of socio-economic advancement and material and cultural achievement. The new members fit in beautifully. Their children are taught in Sunday School how to look for "the best;" and in the denominational weekly the parents read the denominational resolutions about labor, race, international relations, and housing which not only show that the denomination is keeping up with public opinion but, "in the spirit of Jesus," seeks to look for "the best" in it. And so these churches and their people represent "the American spirit" at its "best." And this "best" is even given a sectional breakdown. In the South it means "the South," in Cleveland or Pittsburgh it means the labor union, (but increasingly, management), and in Maine and Kansas it means "rugged individualism" in its rural dress.

Lest we be misunderstood, let us pay tribute to the process just described. It is widely typical of our American scene. It has yielded a rich harvest in social freedom, human values, and Christian character. To despise it is to forget "the pit from which you were dug." But we must ask if this process can be self-perpetuating in its beneficient results. We must ask if this is really the delineation, in its cultural dimensions, of that peculiar work of God in Jesus Christ which is our definition of the Church. Is this the Church, with its *own* theological structures of Christian experience, engaged in the criticism and reformation "after the Word of God" of social and political institutions, our own democratic institutions, or of intellectual and educational structures that nurture our youth? Is this process a means by which these good people can really lay hold of the Church, notably in terms of its cultural implications, and forge new socio-economic, educational, and political forms which in their novelty combine all the pressures and yearnings of modern man in a mass society with an authentic Christian faith that affirms the universal freedom and love of God? Is this process likely to break out in distinctly Christian art forms, or in what Wallace Robbins likes to describe as a "Christian humanism"? Obviously not, for it just never even intended to be the Church in any of these ways. Culturally it "lives off the land." Unless the rich top soil left by an ancient Christian heritage is replenished from elsewhere, this process will eventually wear it out. This process is not the Church in its cultural dimensions; it is sectarian moralism universalized. It talks about freedom for religion at least partly because it will not or cannot forsake anarchy. It issues in "a cut flower civilization" without a foundation of its own, utterly exposed to the blandishments of the demagogue, Marxist, nationalist, or fascist.

The denominations rooted in the churches of the Reformation—Angelican, Lutheran, and Reformed—are the heirs of a heritage that affirms the Church as an organic entity and not as a collection of

individuals. Their heritage—like the Jewish and the Catholic—also insists that God's peculiar work, begun and known in Jesus Christ, must form and ever reform all expressions of human existence. That is, these churches are the heirs of a cultural tradition. The Reformation produced an ethos, at once Christian and contemporaneous, that had its own characteristic forms: Bach in music; Dürer and Rembrandt as painters; Grotius in law; and Milton, and a host with him, in literature. These are characteristically Protestant in the way they embody and set forth the Church. Then there is theology which, at least in Calvinism, by its very "success" became the ground of idolatry. In socio-economic and educational forms likewise there was a spontaneity that brought together the freedom and love of God attested in the Gospels and the contemporary pressures and needs of man in society; and, certainly, the Protestant ethos dictated its own political forms,—the forms which we today revere as the democratic forms. The dislike the English monarchs had for Calvinism was dictated by a healthy self-interest for their crowned heads.

But this Protestant expression of the Church in its cultural dimension has been dissipated by ossification and, even more, by evaporation. It made idols of its forms. Some of them, notably, theology, were the orthodox idols, the ossified forms, which as in Catholicism, provoked strife and discord when they could no longer embody life. Think of the Enlightenment in Europe, and include the Unitarian schism in New England. There are still all sorts of good people who naively assume that ecclesiastical forms as such, whether in theology or in liturgical traditionalism, reveal the Church in its cultural dimensions. Other Protestant forms, scientific, intellectual, political, and so on, became "independent," the forms of a "secular" culture. They were no longer an integral part of the Church nor subject to its criticism and reformation. These forms did not simply claim their *legitimate* autonomy in terms of their own laws, processes, or administration; but this autonomy was absolutized so that the laws and processes of a particular form were conceived to yield an exhaustive account of all meaning; or, otherwise, they transferred the authority under which they all stood from the Church (*i.e.,* from God in his freedom) to reason. The Protestant forms increasingly become idols by being *lost* in the dynamic human process without reference to their true source, the Church, and, there, pretty much, you have the problem of the modern university which was "founded by the Church" or of the modern democratic state, which, *pro-forma,* recognizes God as "Author of liberty." Even where acknowledged, the symbol has changed content. Schools and states that were once the expression of the Church in its cultural dimensions, are now, increasingly, the forms of other "churches" than that which is the peculiar work of God in Christ. This is secularism; and we have as much of it as they do in Italy, even though, we do not have the violence. Protestant culture in its decay does not leave so much debris. And that has advantages, especially for business. But it also has the disadvantage of elusive subtlety. I fear that these denominational heirs of the Protestant Church do not fully know what has happened or how much has been lost. This is notably true of the mass of their laity who, for the most part, have simply gone along with this process of civilization in which the cultural substance of the church has evaporated. Some few of them, of course, went the sectarian way, only to end up finally with Bishop Oxnam and "the American spirit." Even the bulk of the clergy do not seem to know what is happening. They are sincere, self-sacrificing men suffering from theological confusion. They work hard in their parishes; but with this dual process of ossification and evaporation going on they constantly have less and less to work with or for. They are the victims of the impoverishment they are, quite unwittingly, continuously fostering. The end of this impoverishment must begin with a recovery of the freedom which inheres not in our external tradition but in the living God and the Church which is his work among men.

Focus for Christian Action

John C. Bennett

Does Christian Action represent any real consensus among its members? Is it not too vague in purpose and convictions to become a significant or even a useful movement? I believe that this impression of vagueness comes from a comparison with previous movements for Christian social action which usually had a definite panacea to offer for the ills of society. It is one of the essential characteristics of Christian Action that it does not claim to have already most of the answers. It is under an obligation to find some new answers, to find a new way that avoids the familiar stereotypes of "right" and "left," a way that is controlled by a deep and sensitive concern for the welfare of the people who are still exploited and neglected in our world and by the search for wisdom concerning the conditions that make for justice and freedom and fellowship in society as a whole. It tries to find this wisdom in response to the Christian revelation and by attention to the social forces which shape contemporary events. Karl Barth once urged Christians not to sleep on their Bibles or their newspapers. That is an injunction which Christian Action tries to observe.

Both the difficulty and the opportunity which we face in Christian Action can be illustrated by a reference to the situation in which many of us lived twenty years ago. That was the period of the great depression and at the time labor was mostly unorganized and whether organized or unorganized it was helpless to defend itself against unemployment. Most segments of the population shared that feeling of helplessness. It was natural for Christians who were concerned about Social Action during that period to become convinced that nothing short of socialism was an adequate goal. For some years even the strategy of the New Deal was regarded as a false effort to prop up a system that was too rotten to save. At that time most of those who stood for Christian social action had two standards by which they measured all social programs: (1) Is this program a step toward socialism? and (2) will this program strengthen organized labor? Often it was enough to say: "Young man go left." A straight line to the left of the place where we were seemed a clear path of advance. Today it is fair to criticize this naive assumption only if we reconstruct in our minds the place where we were.

Christian Action knows that the whole topography of "left" and "right" has changed, that no political discussion based upon it makes any sense today. The most fateful development has been the Stalinist betrayal of the left. It is now only too obvious that anyone who makes movement toward the left the one standard of social action finds himself an agent of a reactionary force that is far more cruel and oppressive than the capitalism from which he is trying to escape. A few "progressive" Christians went in this direction and became so confused that they did not discover their mistake. There was some excuse for those in the thirties who felt drawn by the diagnosis and the promises of communism but today that excuse has been withdrawn. Only a tiny handful of Christians in America have failed to learn this lesson. This fact makes all of the current charges about the threat of communism within the American churches as irrelevant as they are mischievous.

Two other factors have changed the situation for us:

The first is that there has been enough experience of collectivism in general to enable us to form the judgment that even democratic socialism is no self-sufficient solution of our problems. Countries that have experimented with socialism have become noticeably more circumspect in their thinking about the degrees of socialization that are desirable. In this country where we have had to put the emphasis on social control of the economy for twenty

years because of depression and war, it is also becoming evident that we should think now about a delicate balance between social control and private initiative. Even in this limited context of democratic social controls the one-way street toward the left is no longer sufficient. Today we must think in terms of a pluralistic society, with as much dispersal of power as is compatible with planning for economic stability. We are in debt to the socialist impulse in ways which we are now in danger of forgetting. Economic ativities should be undertaken for the sake of the whole society, and economic power should be under the control of the whole society. The drive toward equality is right not in order to establish a rigid law of equality but to keep under moral judgment every particular form of inequality. But socialism left out of its view of life concerns for values the importance of which has become clear as some of the true goals of socialism are realized.

The other change that has affected our outlook is the new position of power that the labor movement has achieved. This change does not annul the claim that the labor movement has on us. But it does alter the spirit of "crusade" that once was associated with our support of labor. The issues at stake in the industrial conflicts of this decade are vastly different and often more ambiguous than those which were common in earlier decades. One extreme illustration may help to bring out the nature of the difference. In 1919 there was a great steel strike over the 12 hour day and over the right to organize. At that time, quite rightly, progressive Christians went all out in support of the steel workers. Recently there was another steel strike over the issue of contributory versus non-contributory pensions. The unions may have been right in this case, but the problem involved was too technical and also too ambiguous to call forth support on Christian grounds.

While this change in labor's status and power is important, there are two warnings against being guided by it exclusively which need to be offered. There are parts of the country and less favored groups of workers to which what I have said here does not apply. Especially in the South the struggle for minimum rights for labor remains paramount. Also, we do not know how secure this new position of labor would prove to be if we were to have a period of mass unemployment or if we were to have many years of government by business. There is room for debate as to how far employers of labor have come to accept independent unions as a permanent and even a welcome part of our economy. Even if the answer to that question should prove to be on the whole favorable, one would never know what new temptations to break the unions might come with new opportunities to do it.

In our middle class Protestant churches the relationship of the Church to labor remains a problem. The corrective for the one-sidedness of the Church, which labor alone can provide, is still a major need.

. . . . .

I have tried to present some of the reasons why Christian Action must seem more vague and less decisive about many things than its predecessors in the field of Christian social action. The problem is further complicated by the fact that a loss of "emotional appeal" for social action has accompanied the increased ambiguity of the issues. The ability of the social concern of the Church to strike a wide responsiveness within the churches has suffered from many things in recent years. It has suffered from success in reaching a good many of the goals of social action in an earlier period especially in economic life. It has suffered from the greater complexity of issues and the difficulty of making judgments about them on distinctively Christian grounds. It has suffered from the discouragement that has come from the failure of many of the bright hopes on the left and from the overshadowing dangers in the international situation. It has suffered from the resurgence in the churches of a dogmatic individualism which is propagating a counter Social Gospel and causing great confusion.

This situation does create an organizational problem because it is much easier in the short run to win support for a clear panacea which is promoted with confident propaganda including all the simplifying cliches. One of our members has sometimes said that it is impossible to organize a parade for a "mixed economy." That would be true even if the mixture were entirely satisfactory. And yet I think it is quite false to say that the Church is losing concern for the kinds of things that bring us together in Christian Action. And I believe that in spite of the difficulties we encounter, Christian Action does represent a real consensus which is worth defending and working for. I shall try to outline the nature of this consensus in four major areas.

1. *Domestic Economic Policy*

We accept with gratitude the results of the New-Deal revolution in America. We believe that the changes that have taken place in the institutions of our economy and in the assumptions of the American people about economic policies have been on the whole an amazing gain to which the word revolution can be significantly applied. It is now taken for granted that it is the responsibility of government to preserve economic stability. The social security system has come to stay and the only question now is in what directions it should be extended. The new status of labor to which I have referred is a gain of great importance, and the preoccupation of the present Administration with the interests of business calls attention vividly to the need of preserving the power of labor to influence national policy. The political necessity of paying attention to the interests of agriculture is so obvious that farmers are less likely to suffer from neglect than labor under a Republican Administration. The T. V. A. has won its way with most segments of the population. The acceptance of the necessity of public housing is one of the gains which is now seriously threatened, and it calls for vigorous support on our part. The revolution of the Roosevelt and Truman era must continue. It is not enough to conserve gains. For example the development of social security in the sphere of medicine is certainly one of the new frontiers. But as the revolution continues, it will be necessary to give more attention than in the earlier period, of the emergency improvisation, to the decentralization of power, to finding viable combinations of public and private initiative, to the encouragement of the participation of state and local government.

Today we have two kinds of opponents in the economic sphere. There are those who now have high places in government who seek to run the country for the sake of the kind of business interests which so dominate their world that they may honestly confuse them with the public interest. We hope that our opposition to them will not force us into a position of consistent political partisanship because we hope that other and healthier elements in the Republican Party will reassert themselves and alter the direction of the Administration.

Our other opponents are the doctrinaire individualists who see communism or "creeping socialism" in most of the changes of the past twenty years. They are less important now as a threat in the sphere of public policy than they are as a source of confusion in the Church. They must know that no politicans can sell their ideas to enough voters to be elected. But they do get considerable attention for their propaganda in the Church where their idea of a completely free economy is presented as though it were an aspect of Christian freedom. *Christian Economics* which continually rings the changes on this idea is sent free to all ministers. "Spiritual Mobilization" also has wide resources for reaching people in the churches. There is a group of laymen who have had quite a strategic position in the National Council of Churches who are trying, though without success, to neutralize all contrary views in the National Council. Christian Action has the responsibility to help the churches to see the fallacies in this whole effort to

give Christian sanction to pure economic individualism.

The identification of religion with economic conservatism has often extended far beyond this limited circle of dogmatic individualists. There is a type of piety which becomes a front for all forms of moral simplification of political issues. It is today often found on the side of the more moderate conservatism of the Administration as well as on the side of the extremists to whom I have referred. The emphasis upon religion as a support for American institutions and policies gains much strength from the fact that our opponents are atheists. But our American effort to use God for our purposes can easily lead to a corruption of faith which is more dangerous to Christianity than avowed atheism. One hesitates to criticize individuals in this regard because in many cases there may be genuine piety which in personal life goes far to correct the distortion, but the public expressions of this American piety lead chiefly to distortion.

2. *Foreign Policy*

There are some differences among us over the issue of pacifism. But the pacifists who belong to Christian Action are not of the type who try to deduce foreign policy from pacifist principles. Their presence among us does help to remind us of the limitations of policies which most of us are forced to accept by our interpretation of the possibilities open to us as Christians in the world.

We accept the responsibility to prevent the extension of communism and the need of military strength in the free world as a deterrent to the communists and to give opportunity for successful negotiation with them. But we reject the idea that the world struggle is primarily a military struggle or that it can be won by exclusive attention to military power. We believe in a policy based upon cooperation with other nations in the free world. The United Nations is an essential instrument for such a policy and it serves an important function as a forum in which our own aims and methods as a nation come under criticism. We reject utterly the new isolationism which disregards the opinions and the interests of other free nations. We fear the tendency of our policy makers to become too rigid. To win victories over our major friends and allies in the United Nations is to threaten both the moral and the material strength of the free world. We deplore the tendency of our statesmen to take more seriously the pressures from the advocates of unilateralism at home than they do the judgments of the majority of our allies abroad. And we also believe that it is folly to announce that we can make no concessions to our opponents as we begin a process of negotiation with them. The only real alternative to a mad policy of preventive war is the patient effort to find a basis on which coexistence with communist nations is possible. There are free nations that will be threatened by communism if they do not find constructive alternatives to its false promises in the near future. We should give to these nations both moral encouragement and material aid in the solution of their problems and avoid behavior here that causes them to become disillusioned about democracy.

3. *The Race Issue*

In our membership there is probably less disagreement about the problems of race than on any other type of issue. Also, this is an area of our national life in which gains are being made most rapidly. Not only is it true of limited groups such as Christian Action, it is also true of large units of the Church that Christian teaching about race has become more united in recent years. It is very seldom that either racial discrimination or racial segregation is defended by Christians on Christian grounds. The National Council of Churches has made its rejection of racial discrimination and racial segregation unambiguous.

In spite of all these favorable developments, the patterns of both discrimination and segregation in American communities are very stubborn. Even within churches in

the North, minority races are often either excluded officially or, as is more likely to be the case, made to feel unwelcome. The larger the unit of the Church or the nation the better the racial attitudes and practices which we can expect to find. This means that in innumerable local situations—both in the Church and in the community—the members of Christian Action may find a Christian witness on race through action the source of the greatest struggle and difficulty. The Christian Action fellowship should be in such cases a much needed support for our members.

4. *The Threat to Freedom in America*

Here there is general agreement among our members. The only type of disagreement which I have observed is in connection with particular organizations which may be labelled by their critics "communist fronts." Some of our members are more willing than others to give the benefit of the doubt to organizations which are on the borderline in this respect. Others of us have become quite rigid in their determination to have nothing to do with any group which provides any substantial basis for suspicion.

It is possible that in 1953 the sphere of civil liberties is the one where we can accomplish most. Here we are all opposed to the current reckless type of anti-communism, to the tendency to make charges against individuals without emphasizing the date of the connections which are regarded as damaging, to the intimidators of schools and colleges, to the wild generalizations about communism among the clergy, to the pressure to conform to which people in countless communities are subjected. There are some by-products of this present wave of investigations and charges which need to be emphasized. There is the use of the anti-communist smearing to discourage all social reform. There is the distortion of foreign policy through pressure on the State Department by the wild men in congress. There is the false picture of America abroad which has been provided by this behavior at home and which has done much to undermine the morale of the free world.

The Church is still the community or institution in the nation which can claim most decisively that its loyalty extends beyond the nation. In the local community the Church and the minister in spite of the efforts to neutralize them by associating them with communism can often do most to preserve freedom of mind and conscience.

Christian Action and Partisan Politics

It is often asked if Christian Action is committed as such to the Democratic Party. Are we no more than the "A. D. A. at prayer"? The answer is that we hope that we can have more than a partisan base politically. It is true that we have found that most often our affiliations in political conviction are with Democrats rather than with Republicans. We fear both the isolationist wing of the Republican Party and the tendency of the President to surround himself with representatives of business. But the liberal Republicans have an extremely important vocation. We wish that there were more of them and we hope that our fellowship will come more often to include them. It would be a misfortune if either political party were to become, beyond redemption, the party of reaction in domestic affairs and of irresponsibility in foreign policy.

Our Relation to Christian Theology

One of the units which went into the making of Christian Action was The Frontier Fellowship which had a very strong theological orientation. When Christian Action was formed it was recognized that it would be more inclusive in theological point of view than The Frontier Fellowship. Where does it stand?

We try to be clearly Christian and not just another liberal movement.

(Continued on p. 31, col. 2)

Explorations into the Meaning of Freedom
A Panel

I. How Free Are We?

Albert T. Rasmussen

Freedom is a trigger word that still enlists from most Americans an almost reflexive affirmation. Everyone springs to the defense of freedom, but often with cavalier disregard for the tyrannies that circumscribe the lives of all men. Perhaps the greatest danger in our loyalty to freedom is that it may obscure the powerful coercions and limitations under which men live even in a free democratic society. We who seek Christian emancipation from enslavement to our cultural milieu must attempt to recognize how deeply determined and culture-bound we really are.

A belief in natural freedom is harder to justify than perhaps any other of the pretensions of our times. The sea of influence around us is so pervasive and so penetrating that all human beings are bathed and saturated in it from the moment of their birth until the moment of their death. It seems far easier to believe in the "triple predestination" of some of the Calvinists than in the soft notion of independence from the influences of the world. Social psychologists and sociologists find it hard to resist the conclusion of a thorough-going social determinism when they review their empirical evidence. One school of thought simply defines human nature as the subjective aspect of culture.

In any simple choice between the alternatives of a complete determinism and the sentimental freedom that claims that individuals are captains of their own destinies, the latter view taxes our credulity the more. Let us look briefly at the basic kinds of conditioning and coercion to which all human beings are subjected.

First, there is the silent conditioning that begins at birth, within the family, before we have even gained the language with which to protest. By the time we gain the rudiments of language we are already well-advanced toward the habituation of our behavior; we are indoctrinated and moulded by both parental love and chastening. We are civilized under the full force of the patterns and customs which reward us for conformity and continuously impose heavy penalties for infraction and for originality. Our attitudes are drawn out of the common cultural pool; and likewise our consciences are stocked with emotionalized definitions of right and wrong, the flaunting of which produces alienation from our friends and acute disturbances within ourselves. The beliefs that we internalize seem self-evidently correct, and the groups with which we are identified seem so obviously superior that we are ready to defend them aggressively.

But, secondly, even under the unique careers in which we express individualized rebellions and develop personal traits, we have traumatic experiences of alienation and maladjustment which sear into the unconscious structure of our personalities and leave the compulsions that rise up to impel us in inappropriate times and places throughout our lives. Psychiatry has built up a long literature of evidence for this. So we build up the internal coercions and limitations of our past that restrict our freedom to perceive and to choose.

And, thirdly, there are the limitations of the very finitude of our universal mortal lot. Knowing that we are not long for this world, we become overly anxious for our security. The harder we struggle the more prejudicial does our self-interest become and the more defensive we grow in rationalizing our sins and failures. In the drive

to become superior and to fortify ourselves, we succumb to the social climber's sin of class and racial snobbery.

Then we must recognize all of the additional controls and pressures that are growing aspects of our technical social environment. The first of these are the mass-media of communication which combine tested psychological techniques with centralized channels of communication which pipe radio or television to nearly every hearthside. Then add the centralized press which provides the sifted news of events to most of the newspapers in the country and the picture weeklies that blanket the land. Human beings become targets subjected to a continuous bombardment through ear and eye appeals that are beamed to touch the least common denominator desires of men in the interests of the paramount goal of sales.

For the first time in history, the instruments are available for small groups of people to attempt to change human mores and attitudes on a mass scale. What centralized communication can accomplish when monopolized politically has already been demonstrated under modern dictatorships. We can thank God that our communications have not fallen under political monopoly and that the super-advertisers still compete to some degree. However, controversy has already become the great "taboo;" and selling is the dominant purpose. Furthermore, there are already clear tendencies toward selling a way of life in the same boastful and exaggerated way that we sell soap. And this way of life is gadget-centered. It is manipulatory and exploitive, not basically comparative and critical. There is no effective way to talk back to radio or T.V. and grumbling to one's self is not a potent way of registering influence. In fact, one advertising expert says that getting the target angry is a successful technique because the product registers more deeply. "Keep hammering and he will succumb in the end."

In addition to all of these coercions, the "organizational revolution" (described by Kenneth Boulding) has imposed a large scale bureaucratic context upon individuals in the earning of their livelihood. A larger and larger proportion of our people work for large concerns in well-defined roles under rules and orders that allow for very little ethical choice. When a person is beholden to others in whose good graces it is essential to remain for economic survival, there is heavy pressure to say yes, to keep one's mouth shut, and to go along with prevailing policies.

By the time that most decisional situations confront a person, the enclosure of possibilities has narrowed down toward a single response. When an individual faces a concrete moral decision, the answer is often yes or no; take it or leave it. And to leave it may carry such heavy penalties as losing one's job or alienation from one's group. When we wait until we personally face a crisis or a specific temptation, it is usually too late to be creative. As Professor Brunner has put it, our freedom at the point of real choice is frequently a choice between evils. The chance to choose good has already been lost or has never appeared. The "theoretical freedom" to grieve over the lost choice of what might have been if things had developed differently may provide a kind of consolation, but it does not retroact to open lost possibilities. The only practical freedom that has real substance depends largely upon social action in which we participate in events cooperatively while they are in process. And when we cooperate we must compromise and join in the ceaseless struggle to form a consensus that seeks some approximation of justice.

Democracy preserves the indispensable right to discuss, to belong and to criticize. It provides a method for restoring disequilibriums in the balance of power (but with no guarantee of success). However, it cannot overcome social control or abolish the tyrannies of custom and creatureliness.

How can we escape the conclusion that we live in a world of overwhelming coercions and intimidations? Only by the skin of our teech and by the grace of God do we ever escape being a product of forces

external to ourselves. And then only something "outside" can emancipate us. A perspective for judgment that transcends both the personal and cultural and a dependence upon our God who humbles us and with constant interference breaks into the course of things can provide freedom's saving hope. This is the salvation that St. Paul calls "freedom in Christ." And even then we neither shed our prejudices nor escape the pressures of the world, but live on under "the continuing sinfulness of the redeemed."

After pondering earnestly over these things do we still believe that we are free? If we do, is it not a "saved" rather a "natural" freedom upon which we stake our faith? Then let us reaffirm our declaration of dependence and call upon the Lord for help.

II. Christian Freedom and Religious Liberty

Robert T. Handy

American Protestant thought about freedom often seems either superficial or negative. In the 1930's when Hitler was the enemy, there was much talk in church circles about freedom and civil liberties, much denunciation of any suppression of individual freedom. The comments were sincere, but too often they were simply appropriated from the general atmosphere and were not the product of careful consideration on religious premises. This superficiality became evident when the atmosphere changed, as a new enemy dangerous internally as well as externally emerged; and some of the methods we had roundly condemned and which are inconsistent with our heritage were adapted for use against that internal enemy. In the new situation, many Protestants have not even recognized that there is a threat to freedom. And many who are most articulate in their defense of freedom have defined it in a negative way; for them freedom means opposition to whatever would impose any but the barest restraints upon the individual. No matter what the restraint is for, it is bad *per se,* and but a step on the road to totalitarianism.

One of the main reasons why American Protestantism has thought superficially and negatively about freedom is that it has rarely dealt seriously with the nature and meaning of that freedom that concerns it directly—religious freedom. There has been a tendency to accept religious liberty from the general climate of freedom that has characterized American life for most of our history. Today, however, there is a shift in that climate, and the chill blasts of new winds are giving the frail blossom of freedom a severe testing. Dr. Roland H. Bainton has called attention to the new trends in a dramatic paragraph:

> The historian who set out twenty-five years ago to write the history of the struggle for religious liberty believed the subject particularly suited to his pen because the evidence was all in. The victory had been won, and to recount the tale was a task of filial piety in order to extol the exploits of those who had put to flight armies of aliens. Today the armies of aliens hold the field in many quarters, and the history of religious liberty is a chapter in the intelligent man's guide to the reading of the newspapers. We approach the story now not simply to laud but to learn.[1]

The rethinking of the nature of freedom can well begin with a consideration of the nature of religious freedom.

[1] Roland H. Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty: Nine Biographical Studies* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia; 1951), p. 13.

It is clear that the majority of Christians who came to the new world in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries believed in religious uniformity; they retained the view that the maintenance of an established church by the power of the state was necessary to civil peace and a prosperous society. Only slowly, and as several daring experiments succeeded, did the idea of religious liberty spread widely and finally win the victory. The story of that triumph is highly complex, as a number of factors worked together to produce it. There were certain environmental factors at work: the breadth of the ocean was not conducive to the maintenance of vigorous colonial branches of European state churches; frontier conditions gave dissent opportunity to spread with little molestation; and the necessities of having an adequate supply of settlers made persecution unprofitable if the colonies were to succeed economically. Then there were certain "situational" factors at work: the denominational pattern was complex as churches of all the major (and many of the minor) European traditions were transplanted to the new continent; no one denomination had a majority of church members; and the vast number who were members of no church were usually readily inclined to welcome religious liberty. But not at all least in the factors at work were certain theological ones: many were advocating religious liberty on the basis of religious principle, and their contribution was an important one in the final emergence of religious liberty.

There were two main groups in colonial America that struggled for religious freedom on the ground of religious principle. On the one hand there were many like Jefferson who based their position on principles of natural religion; these were the rationalists and the deists, the children of the enlightenment. On the other hand there were many who joined in the battle for freedom on broadly orthodox, classical Christian premises. Dr. Winthrop S. Hudson has recently given a careful analysis of this latter group, characterizing them broadly as standing in the left-wing Puritan tradition. Strongest among the Baptists and Quakers, left-wing Puritan sentiment "was the dynamic religious force in colonial society, and it exerted an increasing influence within all the Protestant churches." [2] The concern of these men for religious liberty was derived in the first instance from the theological doctrines of the sovereignty of God and of human bondage to sin. From these fundamental premises they arrived at three central convictions. They believed that the visible church must be dependent upon God alone, and hence independent of the state. They affirmed that the church must be voluntary in its membership; it must be made up of the convinced. Thirdly, they concluded that inasmuch as unchecked human power leads to rebellion against God it should be limited in church and in state; the tendency of human power to absolutize itself made the hedging of it with limitations necessary.

Though there were sound theological reasons on which religious liberty could be predicated, the great majority of American Protestants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to accept freedom not on the basis of these or any other classically Christian theological premises, but for other reasons entirely. Either they accepted the rationalistic argument for liberty predicated more on the remoteness of God and the goodness of man than on Biblical insights about God and man, or they appropriated their freedom as a matter of convenience or expedience and did not think profoundly about it. As the tides of revivalism and liberalism further weakened Protestant theological concern, serious attention to the matter was further inhibited.

This severing of the theological roots that could nourish a considered and balanced attitude toward liberty has permitted the spread of some peculiar views of what religious liberty really is. One view, wide-

[2] Winthrop S. Hudson, *The Great Tradition of the American Churches* (Harper & Bros., New York; 1953), p. 48.

spread in the United States, is that religious liberty and the separation of church and state are one and the same thing. As Dr. M. Searle Bates has expressed it, "Americans carelessly identify religious liberty with the separation of Church from State, believing that the latter is the sole and necessary ground of the former." [3] Religious liberty is the principle at stake; separation is a means to that end. In the extremer forms of the view that identifies the two, it is felt that there should be no direct contacts between state and church; in effect a barrier between religion and culture is erected. Not only should the state not interfere with the church, but neither should the church seek to influence the state. Many who hold this view are sincerely religious; they seem to think of their church as a pious refuge, a spiritual sanctuary only, to be kept apart from the stains of the world. A central concern seems to be to keep the pure concerns of religion apart from the ambiguous realms of politics.

A second understanding of religious liberty is that there should be no interference as to the individual's personal religious life or convictions from any quarter at all. Those who hold this view exhibit an excessive touchiness about any criticism concerning their religious position whether from the state or from the church, official or unofficial. The chief tenet of their faith seems to be private judgment; even church authorities have no business commenting on the precious plant of their own spirituality.

A third conviction, as to what religious liberty is, holds wide sway beyond the churches but also to a greater extent than we might like to admit within them. This is the conviction that religious liberty means freedom *from* religion. Those who want to interest themselves deeply in religion are certainly free to do so, but they should leave the others—and their world—alone. Religion is a good thing in its place, but those who take it too seriously are somewhat suspect, and fortunately the principle of religious liberty "protects" others against them.

A fourth view, usually found in combination with one or more of the others, is that religious liberty is a device for keeping a particular authoritarian denomination in its proper place. By a rigorous interpretation of the separation of church and state, by vigorous action against any and all tie-ups between any church and political privilege, it is intended to keep Roman Catholicism out of public life as much as possible.

Most of us would feel that there are certainly valid elements in all of these views. However, when they become ends in themselves, when they are divorced from deep theological rootage and freed from the matrix of sound religious thinking, they readily become either superficial or negative. Such shallow concern with the nature and meaning of religious liberty paves the way for shallow thinking about political and civil liberty. The adoption without theological criticism or spiritual insight of current ideas of freedom follows to a considerable extent from our careless adoption of ideas of religious liberty from the principles of the enlightenment or on the basis of expediency. Hence when this freedom is attacked, we share the confusion of our culture.

Historically Protestantism has made a solid contribution to the development of democracy; it did much to establish the ideas of freedom under a higher law, of ethical, ordered liberty, of mutual discussion as a means to wider truth.[4] Protestant theology has done much to prepare the way for liberal democracy; those whose faith in democracy is weakening today may be surprised to find a sound basis for it in realms of thought they may have despised. Abraham Lincoln's comment that "no man is good enough to govern another without that other's consent" is rooted in a theo-

[3] M. Searle Bates, *Religious Liberty: An Inquiry* ("Studies in the World Mission of Christianity," Vol VI; International Missionary Council, New York; 1945), p. 89.

[4] James Hastings Nichols, *Democracy and the Churches* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia; 1951), pp. 29–41.

logical insight clearly expressed (among others) by Calvin: "The vice or imperfection of men therefore renders it safer and more tolerable for the government to be in the hands of many, that they may afford each other mutual assistance and admonition, and that if any one arrogate to himself more than is right, the many may act as censors and masters to restrain his ambition." [5] It is time for Protestantism to cease squandering its rich heritage in riotous living and to deal with the issues of freedom on sound foundations, beginning with first principles.

III. Toward a Re-Definition of Freedom

Robert McAfee Brown

It is clear that "freedom" is one of the most used and ill-defined words in contemporary Protestant vocabulary. In ordinary discussion it seems to have almost completely negative connotations, suggesting nothing more than a lack of coercion or restraint—a kind of anarchy, whether spiritual, economic, ecclesiastical or governmental. Thus a certain type of Congregationalist will loudly laud his denomination's "freedom from external authority," while right-wing groups will define Christian economics as the system with the least amount of government and the greatest amount of Christianity.

The following comments are therefore designed to raise problems which must inform a re-definition of the concept of "freedom" in Protestant thought and are submitted in the gentle hope that someone may come forward with substantial help in solving them. The problem will be raised on four differing levels.

1. *The theological level.* There are resources within Protestant theology for a more profound understanding of freedom than has yet been developed. It is clear, for example, that the New Testament notion of "Christian liberty" is something other than contemporary defenders of freedom seem to think. When Paul deals with the matter in Galatians, he is not simply talking about freedom *from* the law. It is "*for* freedom [that] Christ has set us free," a freedom that makes it possible for us "through love [to] be servants of one another." As Paul puts it in I Corinthians, "Seek not your own good but that of your neighbor." The Epistle of First Peter, in a dazzling paradox, sums up the matter nicely: "Live as free men . . . live as servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16). Christian freedom, in other words, is not freedom to accumulate at the expense of others, or freedom from all kinds of constraints, it is *freedom to serve,* freedom to respond to the divine constraint that we are to love. It is, admittedly, a dangerous kind of freedom, dangerous in the sense that there is no telling where it may lead us. And its implications for social and political life are underlined in the response that Peter and the apostles make to the council: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The Christian is freed for that kind of life. The familiar paradox of Luther in his *Treatise on Christian Liberty* is a classic Reformation statement: "The Christian is most free lord of all and subject to no one; the Christian is most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone." The Free Church insistence upon "the nonconformist conscience" has made this a significant part of our Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Historically, this recognition, that freedom is found in a rigorous regard for the ways of God even at the expense of the ways of men, may have had its clearest witness in the sectarian tradition. However, it is important to remember that it has been latently (and often patently) present in the Reformed Protestant tradition as well. It

[5] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Book IV, Chap. XX, Sec. VIII.

is at just this point that the whole Calvinist doctrine of election has been such a steady guarantor of Christian liberty and freedom to those who were prepared to understand it aright. The Calvinist, convinced that he was the chosen instrument of the Lord, and therefore also convinced that he need be beholden to no man, could live in the liberty of the gospel, never fearful or hedged in when the demands of men went contrary to the demands of God. Thus Calvin, at the conclusion of the *Institutes,* could counsel the "lesser magistrates" to refuse to obey the king if he were to command something contrary to the will of God, and Knox, in an extension of the same principle, could defy a Queen, heedless of his own safety, possessed of a freedom to think and speak and act contrary to convention, because the issues were already in the hands of the living God. Calvin's ringing declaration, "We are not our own, but we are God's," is the only kind of framework within which a solid understanding of Christian freedom can be grounded.

There is another theological concern which is related to a proper understanding of freedom. We see this vividly in the eschatological framework of the early Church. To make the simple declaration of faith, "Christ is Lord," not only demonstrated where one's allegiance lay, it also demonstrated where one's allegiance did not lie, for it implied that since Christ was Lord, Caesar was not Lord. The state was not the final authority; Christ was the final authority. And in this belief the early Church was given (in principle at least, and often in practice) a splendid kind of freedom. There could be a gay abandon in the face of pressures from the state, for the Christian was liberated from fear of what the state could do to him, and liberated for the life which is hid with Christ in God, and which the state was unable to destroy. To believe that "here we have no continuing city," rather than crippling one's activity in this world was, in point of fact, to be set free to live within the arena where one was "a stranger and pilgrim" in a more responsible way than ever. The whole eschatological framework, rather than hampering the Christian, was a remarkable source of power for the Christian. And it will be important for us, in the months leading up to the Evanston Conference, to spell out some of the implications for Christian freedom which lie implicit in the Biblical eschatology.

2. *The political level.* What is most alarmingly evident in our American political life is that it is this kind of freedom, namely the freedom to say, "We are not our own, but we are God's," which is progressively coming under attack. The freedom to act in the name of a loyalty higher than a naive type of laissez-faire, or a nasty type of Republicanism, or a perverted type of Americanism, is being challenged. While the problem is deeper than "McCarthyism," that word can serve as an ugly symbol of what is at stake. And what is needed is not simply more of the conventional kind of attacks upon the methods and tactics and (more important) the presuppositions of the junior senator from Wisconsin, although they are important. What is needed is for groups of the calibre of Christian Action to hammer out a counter-offensive which will deal with the stifling of the right of dissent, from a viable theological base. This is important not only from the point of view of the health of the nation, but also from the point of view of the health of the Church itself. There are few things more dismaying than the glib acceptance on the part of most laymen and many ministers of the "I-Don't-Like-McCarthy's-Methods-But" line. And in forthcoming investigations, it will not be enough simply to rush to the bandwagon which plays the tune, "Our churches are being attacked." A more positive analysis is necessary, and it is in the hope of stirring someone in that direction that this particular marginal note is included.

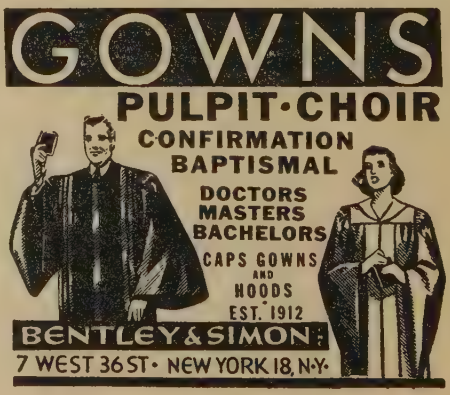
3. *The personal level.* Another problem arises when one takes the revised notion of Christian liberty suggested above and applies it at the personal level. It will be agreed, I trust, that a valid conception of

Christian liberty may make it necessary on occasion for the individual to speak out in the name of God, or his understanding of God's will, in a way that will be highly unpopular. Something may be at stake for which a stand must be taken, regardless of the consequences. So far so good. But the problem arises in this way. The "individual" can never speak merely for himself. He can never fully isolate what he does or what he says from his own social context. That is to say, his church will be implicated, or his colleagues in business, or his associates on a college campus. What responsibility does he bear to these people? In trying to be faithful to the demands of God above, must he not also be sensitive to the dangers he may bring upon men about him? If his activity will jeopardize the name of the institution for which he works, or the security of the colleagues with whom he works ("College X must be a hotbed of subversives; look at what they let Professor Y get away with"), is not this an important factor in his decision about what he will do?

Clearly no formula will solve this problem. Clearly the above line of reasoning can provide a superb rationalization for refraining from action. But clearly, also, the problem may not be dodged by a glib repetition that "We must obey God rather than men." The person today who feels impelled to take his Christian freedom seriously in a specific political, economic, or social fight, must face this issue. And any save the most insensitive must see that the Christian has a moral responsibility to consider the effects of his action upon those whom he will implicate because he is a member of society, and not simply a law unto himself.

4. *The ecclesiastical level.* A different set of concerns come into focus when one looks at the problem of "freedom" in the life of the Church. One of these has to do with the relationship of freedom and tradition in the life of any given Christian body. Protestants, no less than Catholics, have a tradition and heritage of which we ought to be proud. We should not lightly bypass the wisdom of the centuries or too easily scrap the beliefs of our forefathers. Our faith is something which has been *given* to us, rather than something we have concocted and invented between Sundays.

And yet to talk this way is to sound a distinctly foreign note in most Protestant discussion. "This is just what we have been freed from," is the counter-claim, a claim which combines bad theology with bad grammar. And our need is to discover new ways in which we can articulate "the freedom for which Christ set us free" within the context of responsibility to our various traditions. Now there are times when "tradition" appears as the dead hand of the past, stifling us rather than encouraging us. But I would suggest that this is not true nearly so often as we claim it is. Few things, for example, would do more for contemporary Protestantism's understanding of "freedom" than a thorough attempt to understand the Reformers at this point. It is as we discover the riches and the resources of our own traditions that we will be enabled to make those insights most applicable to our situation today. Protestantism is not "the right of private judgment," no matter how loudly our pulpits may tell us so. It is commitment to the Christ who is "the same yesterday, today, and forever;" and we must not be afraid to have our own partial understanding of that Christ chastened, corrected, tempered and invigorated by the witness he has left of himself in the communion of saints down through the ages.



REVIEWS

The Significance of Organizations

The Organizational Revolution, By Kenneth E. Boulding, with commentary by Reinhold Niebuhr; Harper and Brothers, New York; 1953; 286 pp., $3.50.

The revolution in organization and communication is perhaps the most significant development of our time. Without it, totalitarianism as we know it could hardly have emerged, and Western society would never have developed into the mass democracy of today. It is the "organizational revolution," closely bound up with the advance of physical technology, which has given modern life its characteristic aspect.

In this volume, the second in the series reporting the study initiated by the Federal Council of Churches on "the ethics and economics of society," Kenneth Boulding subjects this "organizational revolution" to careful scrutiny. Mr. Boulding is a distinguished professor of economics and a devout Quaker, and his work reflects both of these concerns. It is a study of the nature, causes, and consequences of the transformation of social life brought about by the immense proliferation of organization in recent decades, followed by some "case" studies, in which the labor and farm movements, the cooperative enterprise, business organizations, and the modern state are examined from the point of view of the impact of the "organizational revolution" upon contemporary society. Throughout, Mr. Boulding's interest is not only sociological; it is also, perhaps primarily, ethical, for it is the author's purpose to assess the forms of economic organization he deals with in the light of a Christian ethic. An unusual, and very valuable, feature of the book is to be found in Part III, in which Reinhold Niebuhr and others comment on Mr. Boulding's findings, and Mr. Boulding replies.

Mr. Boulding opens his study with a lucid outline of his theory of organization. The dominant concepts along which this theory is developed are rooted in a systematic biological analogy, in which human society is interpreted in "organic" terms and human history is seen as "structurally a continuation of the immense process of evolution." In fact, according to Mr. Boulding, "countries, businesses, unions, coops, churches are the successors, in the immense process of ecological change, of the humble amoeba, the lichen, and the dinosaur." This kind of biologism is aggravated by the fact that Mr. Boulding thinks of the biological organism itself in *mechanical* terms, employing the recently developed vocabulary of control mechanisms ("an organization—that is, an information - communication - executive - effector chain . . .") for all it is worth. As a consequence, the dimension of freedom and creativity, of transcendence, in man and society tends to be obscured, and there is little sense of the disruptive powers of irrationality and evil in human existence which may take hold of even the best organizational mechanism to exploit or to smash it. Mr. Boulding seems altogether to ignore these dynamic forces involved in human freedom, with the result that it is the organizational mechanism to which everything, good and evil alike, is reduced. How else are we to interpret such statements as, "If things go from bad to worse, instead of from bad to better, the reason is to be looked for in a failure of the organizational system"?

Inevitably, this view leads to a kind of sociological body-soul dualism, which Reinhold Niebuhr criticizes so aptly in his comments. "The trouble," Mr. Boulding says, "lies, of course, in the 'flesh'; that is, in organization. All bodies are corruptible, whether the body of literal flesh, or the body of the state, the corporation, the trade union, the philanthropic organization, or the church." This contrast of a presumably pure "soul" and a corruptible and corrupting "body" is no more true to social life than it is to the personal life of

man; it is certainly not the way the Bible deals with human existence and its problems. "Body" and "soul" are as fused on the social level as they are in the psychosomatic unity of personal life: organization does indeed have its own logic, as Mr. Boulding points out, but it is a "logic" that is predicated upon and actualized through forces of human self-interest which lie far below the level of organization.

In line with his basic approach, Mr. Boulding stresses a "polylithic" as against a monolithic organization of society, with many centers of power rather than one. This emphasis is, of course, very necessary and very welcome. But again it is mechanistically conceived. Mr. Boulding's picture of society here presented is of a vast network of limited special-purpose organizations, with the state as "an over-all organization with limited powers to act as a 'governor,' to keep an eye on the aggregate variables of society which are not under the control of any one of its constituent organizations, and to have the power to act 'counterwise' . . ." It may be questioned whether this is an adequate account of the role of the state in modern society, but perhaps more important is the strange oversimplification of social structure here implied. Despite the biological metaphors to which he resorts, Mr. Boulding has little to say about the organic coherences of nation, family, worship, and work which form the basic tissue of society and touch human existence on a level far deeper than the "functional" institutions that emerge in social life. But because these really organic coherences cannot well be interpreted in mechanistic terms, Mr. Boulding either ignores them entirely or else reduces them to the status of voluntary special-purpose institutions. In either case, a serious distortion of social reality is the result, but this distortion is something Mr. Boulding can hardly avoid, given the organizational rationalism on which his thinking is premised.

The basic difficulty of Mr. Boulding's position, to which Niebuhr devotes the major part of his critical essay, is an outgrowth of this organizational rationalism compounded with Mr. Boulding's understanding of the Christian ethic. To Mr. Boulding "one of the greatest obstacles to progress is the coercive nature of political institutions." Only perfunctorily does he grant that coercion may be necessary here and there; he has little sense, it seems to me, of how deeply *all* social institutions, and not merely governmental, are involved in coercion and how profoundly coercion enters into God's order of preservation of this our sinful life in history. To Mr. Boulding coercion is *the* violation of the Christian love commandment, and every institution is graded in terms of this criterion. What is ignored in this account of the matter, as Niebuhr so well points out, is the fact that the radical antithesis of Christian love is to be found not so much in coercion as in *self-love* (or self-interest), and even the most apparently non-coercive institutions, such as Mr. Boulding holds the "free market" to be, may well be dominated by the power of sin in this form. "The most ideal social organization," Niebuhr notes, "is obviously one in which men work harmoniously together without coercion. This requires that each seek the good of the other. But this ideal is not easily achieved. The family, among all human communities, comes closest to this ideal; but even in the family some coercion is used to preserve order and harmony against recalcitrant tendencies. The more complex the human community becomes, the more it is subject to the perils of chaos arising from conflicting interests." Somehow, Mr. Boulding refuses to see this. His oversimplified animus against coercion leads him to an incredible diatribe against conscription in war time, in which he overlooks entirely the gross injustices inevitably involved in any system of "voluntary" enlistment under conditions of national emergency.

Even more incredible, yet likewise flowing from Mr. Boulding's premises, is his

identification of Christian sacrificial love with business service.

> If—as I think in Christian thought we must—we place a high value on the ideal of service [Mr. Boulding asserts], we must recognize also that this implies placing a high value on defenselessness. It is the productive and defenseless lamb that is the symbol of Christ, not the predatory, unproductive, and armed eagles, lions, and suchlike beasts that are the symbols of the national state.

I will say nothing of the strange misunderstanding of Christian iconography these words suggest; what startles me is the offhand identification of economic productiveness with Christian *agape*. What can one say in the face of such an equation? Really, has it never occurred to Mr. Boulding that productive economic activity may be as sin-ridden in the obsessive self-interest that dominates it as the most predatory adventure, while on the other hand, coercion, even war, may under certain circumstances emerge as a responsibility under the divine imperative that calls us to love and justice? Of such tragic complexities in actual historical existence, Mr. Boulding's account yields hardly a glimpse.

My review has turned out to be almost entirely critical. I have not been able to do justice to the great and undoubted merits of Mr. Boulding's study—the wide information that underlies it, the real insights into the nature of organization with which it is filled, the frank and judicious discussion of the economic and ethical aspects of labor, farm, business, and political institutions. These merits make the work one that every person concerned with the problem of organization in contemporary society will find indispensable. But the shortcomings to which I have alluded are there, and they are shortcomings that affect the basic approach and interpretive categories of the work. In the last analysis, they are shortcomings of a theological nature.

Will Herberg

*(**Focus;** Continued from p. 20)*

We share a common dissatisfaction with the simple ways in which theological liberalism often related Christian faith and ethics to social action. Our avoidance of panaceas, of all single-track politics, has a theological basis for most of us.

We are concerned about the *Church* and its distinctive tasks.

We are concerned to discover Christian truth in response to the revelation of God in Christ and in interaction with the great tradition of Christian thought.

We are influenced by the ecumenical movement in its wrestling with the problems of theology.

To me the major fact is that we are influenced in varying degrees by the great revival of Christian theology in our time and we are not among those who are trying to defend themselves against it.

Though we take seriously the Biblical revelation, the creative moments of the theological tradition, and the distinctive role of the Church as the community of grace, we do not all hold the same opinions about doctrinal questions.

We do not represent any system—Liberal or Neo-orthodox. But we have a theological concern, a theological task, a desire to learn more of Christian truth.

We in America may be in a low period of interest in the social concern of the Church, even while there are signs of a new interest in Christian social action in many other countries, perhaps most of all in Germany and in the countries of Asia. We must be prepared to admit that there have been set-backs in this country. But we must recognize also that the Christian responsibility for social institutions is clearer than ever in the Church as a whole. Our own task as a fellowship and as a movement for action is therefore urgent. It is laid upon us by the very nature of our Christian faith.

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